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RUALSFJ/COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA AB JA PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KS](#) [KN](#)
SUBJECT: PROMINENT NK DEFECTORS FORM RADICAL NGO

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) "Aquariums of Pyongyang" author Kang Cheol-hwan, former DPRK inner-circle member Hwang Jang-yop and other prominent North Korean defectors have formed a new organization, the Committee for Democratization of North Korea (CDNK). Its main goals are to topple the DPRK regime and organize defectors to aid in the transition to a post-Kim Jong-il environment. One of the few political organizations founded by and for North Korean defectors, CDNK is likely to be one of the most extreme of the ROK's conservative, anti-DPRK groups. END SUMMARY.

DEFECTORS WANT ROLE IN UNIFICATION

12. (SBU) Claiming to represent the over 10,000 resettled North Koreans in the ROK, the newly formed CDNK aims to support awareness of human rights in the DPRK, push for the collapse of Kim Jong-il's regime, and prepare for the post-Kim Jong-il era. At the group's April 10 opening ceremony, CDNK President Hwang Jang-yop told attendees that "defectors must play a pivotal role in enabling the flower of freedom to blossom in North Korea." Former President Kim Young-sam, CDNK's honorary chairman, said that "defectors must win the battle for democratization of North Korea. I hope that they will become proud heroes of a new history." CDNK has 20 member organizations, including NKGulag, Free NK Radio and the North Korean Defectors Association, and 1,000 individual members.

13. (C) The driving force behind this group is "Aquariums of Pyongyang" author Kang Cheol-hwan, who serves as CDNK Chairman and works from a small office across the street from the Ministry of Unification. Kang told us on May 7 that there is an evolving consensus among North Korean defectors that not only is the DPRK regime in danger of imminent collapse, but also that defectors should play a major role in building a unified Korea. A banner hanging in the office said "Topple the Kim Jong-il Regime" in red lettering.

14. (C) Kang said that defectors, with their understanding of North Korea and their networks in the DPRK, are best positioned to ensure that the next generation in North Korea is prepared to open up and introduce reforms. Kang said defectors could serve as an important bridge in unification. Anti-ROK sentiment is so high among North Koreans that ROK officials will have difficulty being effective in the North.

South Koreans lack credibility and legitimacy because of their willingness to follow Americans and their failure to stand up for DPRK human rights, Kang said. They have no legitimacy.

SIGNS OF DPRK COLLAPSE

¶15. (C) Kang predicted that the DPRK will fall when the number of defectors in the ROK, currently at 10,000, reaches 100,000. As signs of imminent collapse, Kang pointed to the increased flow of information along the North Korea- China border and the routine movements of North Koreans back-and-forth between the two countries. Kang said that it is becoming increasingly apparent that the DPRK central government is losing control of the local governments. For example, he said, although the central government has ordered border provinces to close the borders, guards there continue to accept bribes (usually between USD 50 and USD 100) and allow people to cross. Kang reported that there is growing sentiment among guards that one would be a fool not to accept money from border-crossers.

¶16. (C) Kang said that the central government, increasingly desperate to stop this activity, has begun to execute military officials who have accepted bribes along the border. Under past practice, Kang said, the regime executed only civilians.

CDNK TO HASTEN COLLAPSE

¶17. (C) To hasten a collapse of the DPRK, CDNK intends to organize defectors to raise awareness about human rights issues, push China not to repatriate North Koreans, and distribute radios in North Korea. The radios will be distributed from safe houses along the China border where traders, defectors and smugglers regularly meet. Kang is confident that the radios will be disbursed throughout the country and into Pyongyang. The radios could easily be smuggled to Shinuiju, where it is possible to meet traders from Pyongyang. Even if the bulk of the radios stay around the border, Kang said, it would still be worthwhile. There are 300,000 North Korean soldiers amassed along the DPRK-China border with nothing to do at night. With radios, they would at least begin to understand the outside world.

¶18. (C) Although continued pressure, such as the BDA investigation, could be fruitful, Kang said that the U.S. did not have to anything to bring about a collapse of North Korea; it would just fall on its own, he said.

PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS FOR DEFECTORS

¶19. (C) CDNK will also promote the human rights of defectors in South Korea. In particular, Kang said that CDNK would address the issue of Korean citizen identification cards, which indicate by numeric code whether the holder is a resettled North Korean. According to Kang, potential employers have broken this code and reject resettled North Korean applicants. China has also discovered the code and subjects defectors traveling in China to surveillance and other harassment. Another objective of CDNK is to form an experts group of high-level defectors.

SKELETONS IN BLUE HOUSE CLOSETS

¶10. (C) Kang said that attempts to cooperate with the Blue House have been unsuccessful. Kang said that the current ROK leadership can be divided into two camps. The first consists of people who have either been bribed by the DPRK or have something to hide from their days as student activists. Kang explained that in the 1980s, it was fashionable among activists to study "juche" philosophy and be acknowledged by the DPRK, sometimes through trips to Pyongyang. Fearing leaks to the media, officials with this background advocate a

soft line with the DPRK even if they do not still support the DPRK. The other group, smaller than the first, is comprised of those who really share the juche ideology.

¶11. (C) Kang said that he was disappointed that the Grand National Party was reconsidering its North Korea policy. However, he wondered whether it was merely an election year ploy to attract more progressive voters. Kang said that CDNK leadership was still debating the group's political role in the upcoming presidential election. He said that if one includes family members of defectors, CDNK could command between 20,000 and 30,000 votes.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) Kang has long been associated with NKGulag, a defectors' human rights organization that advocates a hard-line view towards North Korea. We understand that Kang's anti-DPRK politics became too extreme even for NKGulag, which edged Kang out of its leadership circle over the past year. We expect CDNK to be a vocal and harsh critic of the DPRK and the ROK political rush to capitalize on thawing inter-Korean relations. While most South Koreans will not be sympathetic to CDNK's confrontational tactics, the approach could resonate among the North Koreans resettled in the South, especially as more of them find themselves cut out from the mainstream South Korean society and economy. This risk will grow correspondingly with the size of the North Korean population in the South.
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